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Jack Dollard and the SAND Everywhere School

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John L. Dollard came to Hartford in 1957 because he thought it was a place where he would “be heard.” Educated at Cornell and Yale Universities, “Jack” Dollard was a **bigger-**than-life advocate for urban renewal and the urban poor. His concern for the living conditions and educational opportunities of Hartford’s neediest citizens led him to develop an innovative housing project in the South Arsenal neighborhood. In this revamped style of urban renewal, **Dollard** created a community based on education and upward mobility. It became known as SAND (South Arsenal Neighborhood **Development**)² and was centered around its elementary school: the SAND Everywhere School.

In Jack Dollard’s vision for the SAND Everywhere School, he dreamed of an idealistic community in which educational opportunity would create social responsibility and improve the economic prosperity of Hartford’s poorest neighborhood. These visions quickly faded in the face of the reality of funding and experimental education theories. SAND Everywhere was a disaster. In spite of the failure of the SAND Everywhere School, when a new school was built in South Arsenal in 1997, it was described using the language of the ideals of Jack **Dollard**.

The South Arsenal Neighborhood

The South Arsenal Neighborhood of Hartford’s North End has long been the most economically depressed area of the city. Located just north of downtown, the South Arsenal neighborhood occupies an area of approximately fifty-six acres between Main Street, the Windsor Avenue Extension, Pavillion Street and Blake Street. The population of the South Arsenal neighborhood in the 1960s was approximately 60% African-American and 40% Hispanic-American (predominantly Puerto Rican). A 1964 study conducted by Harvard University on Hartford’s school system determined that “Hartford’s non-white population was

¹ Cynthia **Wolfson**, ‘A Brief **Encounter** with Jack **Dollard**,’ *Northeast Magazine, The Hartford Courant*. March 4, 1984, p. 60.

² SAND refers to both the neighborhood and the Corporation, which I address on page 3.

restricted to 169 city blocks out of 889 in the city, found primarily in the northeast corner of the city” and that these areas have the lowest income levels and the highest **unemployment**.³ A working paper for the Everywhere School reports that in the early **1960s**, “most of the housing units were constructed before 1900, are three-story brick converted multi-family units **(55%)** deficient and substandard **(50%)** without central heat (54%) and tenant occupied (96%). The present elementary school was built in **1899**.”⁴ The area was desperately in need of renewal.

Hartford’s Schools

The 1960s were a turbulent decade for Hartford’s schools. Overcrowding was an important issue, which in turn gave rise to the issues of segregation and equal education. In 1963, the total population of the Hartford school system increased by 991 students; the following year it increased by 605. The majority of the increases occurred in the North End, home to Hartford’s poorest neighborhoods, including South Arsenal. Although school districts had been redrawn, it was clear that the North End was as badly in need of a new elementary school as it was of new housing.’

When it came to building new schools, segregation and equal education were pressing concerns for Hartford residents. In 1964, Harvard University conducted a study of Hartford’s schools, the text of which was published in *The Hartford Courant*. It reported that “pupils in the poverty area are one-half year behind the city average in mental age when they enter first **grade**.”⁶ While a new elementary school was necessary for the North End of Hartford, North End parents were concerned about the quality education that their children would receive in their

³ “Text of Preliminary Harvard Study of **Hartford’s** School Setup,” *The Hartford Courant*, May 28, 1963, p. 44.

⁴ South Arsenal Neighborhood Development Corporation, “The Everywhere School – Working Paper,” **undated photocopy**, p. 9. The Jack Dollard Papers, The Connecticut Historical Society.

⁵ Paul Hodge, “City School System Shows Enrollment Increase of 605,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 1, 1964, p. 11.

⁶ “Text of Preliminary Harvard Study of Hartford’s School Setup,” p. 44.

own neighborhoods.’ The residents of South Arsenal did not want just another housing project or school; they wanted to improve upon their housing and community, not go from one bad situation to another.

SAND Everywhere School

Enter Jack Dollard. It is certain that Jack Dollard read this report and was familiar with the discussions of segregation and the concerns of parents over their children’s educations. Dollard was initially involved in the neighborhood when, while working as a consultant for the city of Hartford, he constructed a “good old slum playground” there in 1962.⁷ Dollard reports that the neighborhood hated the playground built of odds and ends and wanted a newer facility for their children, something like those in West Hartford. In response to their concerns, Dollard helped the community become incorporated (so that they could apply for grants) and organized so that they could voice their needs and concerns regarding their future. Thus the South Arsenal Neighborhood Development Corporation (SAND) was born.

Dollard wanted to give this neighborhood a community that was better than what they had before renewal. When the time came to approach the city with a renewal plan for the neighborhood, Dollard presented the **SAND** Planning Committee, consisting of eight South Arsenal residents, with four choices: a) neighborhood into a house, b) neighborhood into an urban park, c) neighborhood into a factory, and d) neighborhood into a university. Plan D was the plan that was chosen. Dollard explained:

The place I know that’s most like South Arsenal is Yale University, the analogy being that everybody works, plays, lives, does their whole thing in one place. Both communities are living the same kind of life. There’s on big difference: everybody at Yale is trying to get ahead, economically, socially, intellectually, whereas everybody

⁷ “Public Divided on New Schools,” *The Hartford Times*, December 23, 1963.

⁸ Jack Dollard, “SAND Corporation’s ‘Everywhere School,’” undated photocopy, p. 55. The Jack Dollard Papers, The Connecticut Historical Society.

here in South Arsenal is **left** out. If we could turn conditions around and make education a positive reason for living in South Arsenal, maybe we could win some day.' His idea was to make South Arsenal a self-contained community based on education. As Dollard points out, there are some obvious differences between Yale and South Arsenal. For one, the citizens of Yale are there by choice, not by lack of choice. Dollard realized this and wanted to change South Arsenal into a place where people would like to live, where they would have options, and where, like Yale, they could use their community to get ahead socially, economically, and intellectually. Jack Dollard viewed public housing as temporary and believed that in order for people to move beyond such housing they needed to be educated to be **self-**supportive.¹⁰ For Dollard, education was the key to independence. Jack Dollard wanted to provide the North End with a school that the whole city would be proud of and that would help the citizens of the South Arsenal neighborhood overcome their poverty.

In this way, the South Arsenal Housing Project was designed much like a university. Housing and educational buildings were interspersed with recreational, artistic, health and occupational centers. The educational center, which would "form the physical and emotional spine of the new South Arsenal community,"⁹ was the SAND Everywhere School. By drawing on the educational theories of open-schools and Montessori, Dollard designed a school based on the open-classroom plan, but that would be located in eleven buildings dispersed throughout the neighborhood: an open-classroom and an open-campus. The key elements would be seven Multi-Instructional Areas (MIAs), each holding 150 students. These areas were designed to be 5,000 square foot open-classrooms having movable properties, including the walls and carpeting. The theory behind the open-classroom concept is that children learn "from a total experience

⁹ Dollard, "SAND Corporation's 'Everywhere School,'" p. 57.

¹⁰ Paper with the heading "Neighborhoods," undated photocopy, p. 1. The Jack Dollard Papers, The Connecticut Historical Society.

¹¹ South Arsenal Neighborhood Development Corporation, p. 9.

rather than in successive, discrete **steps.**"¹² One wall was composed entirely of windows because Dollar-d felt that "it is important that everyone can see into the Multi-Instructional Areas, as well as the presence of the outside neighborhood always be felt inside the Multi-Instructional **Area.**"¹³ Dollard wanted a constant give and take between the school and the community, each constantly reminded of each others presence. That way the students would be able to understand the purpose of their educations – that it was to be applied to the world around them, and the community would become immersed in the idea of education, making it the most important and prominent aspect of their community. Individual teaching teams were to have control over the set up of each MIA, meaning that each MIA would be different depending on the teachers. In separate buildings, a community theater would serve as an auditorium, a resource center as the library and a neighborhood recreational center as the gym. Students (ages 2-sixth grade) would move between buildings to attend music class, eat lunch, and so on. By creating a fluid and flexible school space, to which the whole community has access, the school becomes an integral part of the community and thereby increases the value placed on education.

Dollar-d's proposal was developed at the same time as the Harvard **Study,**¹⁴ which suggested that "whenever appropriate, the primary and middle schools would be designed as community schools, serving the recreational, service, and instructional needs of the surrounding community's young and old alike."" It is no surprise that with an endorsement from Harvard University this proposal was hailed as exceptional in its day.

¹² Roland S. Barth, Open Education and the American School (New York: Agathon Press, Inc., 1972), 5.

¹³ Jack Dollard, "The Everywhere School" undated photocopy, p. 1, The Jack Dollard Papers, The Connecticut **Historical** Society.

¹⁴ It is unclear just how much of Dollard's plans were developed before this study was published. Very few reports in the Jack Dollard Papers are dated and while most can be narrowed down to a particular year or so, exact dating for the most part is impossible. The ideas are so similar that it seems impossible that Dollard was not **influenced** by this report during the **development** of the Everywhere School.

¹⁵ "Text of School Report," *The Hartford Courant*, May 28, 1965, p.35, col 5.

The open-classroom concept was becoming increasingly popular around the world. Other schools were built in Hartford in the open-classroom format at around the same time as the Everywhere School: Simpson-Waverly (1970) and Kinsella (1974).¹⁶ The Canadian province of Ontario built 400 open-classroom schools in the years between 1967 and 1972. Jack Dollard's open-campus plan takes the concept one step further, symbolically removing the exterior walls as the open-classroom removes the interior ones.

Architectural Forum called Dollard's plans "a brilliant answer to the ills of inner-city education, and, at the same time, a down-to-earth proposal that is thoroughly workable."¹⁷ This same article claims that the University of Massachusetts school of education "endorses it completely."¹⁸ In an interesting prophesy, Ellen Perry Berkeley wrote, "No one knows if these ideas will work in the ways that are envisioned . . . Who, among those whose approval is needed on this proposal, wants the responsibility for having turned it down."¹⁹ Indeed, the Hartford school board approved the concept 7-2.²⁰

What Went Wrong

Unfortunately, Dollard's proposal was not "thoroughly workable," and they did not "work in the ways that [were] envisioned." There is no doubt in anyone's mind that the SAND Everywhere School, as conceived by Jack Dollard, was a failure. The open-classroom concept on a whole was a passing fad. What makes the SAND Everywhere School stand out from other unsuccessful open-schools, however, is that there are actually two aspects to be examined with regards to the failure of this school. The first is the open-classroom format; the second is the

¹⁶ Anne M. Hamilton, "Fixing up the City Schools; More Than \$100 Million Being Spent on Improvements," *The Hartford Courant*, August 31, 1997, sec. H1.

¹⁷ Ellen Perry Berkeley, "Urban Renewal Need Not Be a Dirty Word," *Architectural Forum*, April 1969, 37, "Berkeley, 37.

"Berkeley, 41.

²⁰ Jack Dollard, "SAND Corporation's 'Everywhere School,'" p. 57.

“university campus” layout. By the early 70s,²¹ parents and educators in Ontario, Canada were already beginning to question the quality of their children’s educations in open-schools.²¹ The open spaces of the Simpson-Waverly and Kinsella schools were easily turned into more traditional classroom spaces.²² Like most of the open-classroom schools, the SAND Everywhere School proved to be a chaotic and unproductive learning environment.

The failure of the open classroom could have been fixed without tremendous cost or time if that was the only problem with the set up of the school. At the Everywhere School, however, the failure of the open-classroom was compounded by the failure of the open-campus layout. While an open campus works for university students and adults, it is highly impractical for students aged 2-12. New England weather is unpredictable and during the months in which school is open the weather is more often than not cold, rainy or both. Enormous amounts of time were wasted by teachers having to bundle up a class of 30 students in order to go to lunch or to the library. Teachers reported that parents were keeping their children home on bitterly cold days rather than having them walk around outdoors during the day.²³ In some cases the walk from one classroom to another was five minutes or more, which, in spite of the weather conditions, adds up over the course of a school year. *The Hartford Courant* reported that “the average student lost two weeks of instructional time per year, and some logged up to 130 miles each year crossing the campus.”²⁴ While the amount of time spent out of the classroom was perhaps a predictable outcome of the campus layout, another unfortunate outcome was less so.

The rise in crime in the South Arsenal Neighborhood in the early 1990s became an overwhelming factor in the decision to keep the students from moving from building to building.

²¹ “Second Thoughts On ‘Open Schools,’” *The New York Times*, April 16, 1972, Education, p. 9.

²² Hamilton, sec. H1.

²³ Jane E. Dee, “New Classrooms East Tensions at SAND School,” *The Hartford Courant*, May 2, 1996, A1.

²⁴ Dee, A1.

With the introduction of crack cocaine to Hartford, drug deals and gang wars gave the neighborhood an incredibly high crime rate and made the campus of the Everywhere School every parent's worst nightmare. In addition to the weather, children now had to dodge bullets and steer clear of hypodermic needles, used condoms, even drug deals taking place in the midst of their school. One teacher at the school told *Hartford Courant* correspondent Jane E. Dee that she and her students "occasionally had to duck to the floor of the old building.. . when gunshots rang out."²⁵ Members of the community once again raised their voices in protest – this time *against the* Everywhere School. Parents wanted their children safely ensconced in one building during the school day and requested that a new school be built housing all of the students in one building.

Dollard's Reaction

Understandably, Jack Dollard did not believe that the design of the school was the sole cause of the problem. There were financial problems from the beginning, so that the school was never built to Dollard's specifications. Dollard blames the shift in political atmosphere that occurred when Richard Nixon was elected President, claiming that Americans were no longer concerned with helping the nation's urban poor. In addition, the Federal Department of Housing "decided that the school elements could not be located on the ground floors of the housing because the funds to build the school would come from a different source (Department of **Education**)."²⁶ On a more local level, the Superintendent of Schools, **Medill** Bair, who had been a staunch supporter of the school, resigned, taking with him all support on the board of

²⁵ Dee, "New Classrooms Ease Tensions at SAND School," A1.

²⁶ Dollard, "S.A.N.D. History Repeats Itself," undated photocopy, p. 1. The Jack Dollard Papers, The Connecticut Historical Society. This change was probably a blessing down the road when the open-campus concept was abandoned,

education. Finally, Dollard felt that the teachers were not properly trained to control such a space. This is a common complaint about the open-classroom format.

In the mid 1990s,²⁷ Dollard wrote a brief synopsis on his concerns over the state of the SAND housing development. In this work he compares his original plans with the reality of what was built saying that “the concept of the nine building school located throughout the neighborhood was won, but the war was lost. The buildings were designed as inflexible spaces. The teachers were not trained to teach in open space classrooms and chaos reigned.²⁸ This seems to be as much a breakdown of the organizational structure as any failure of the buildings. There were problems with the administrative structure of the school, although this is seldom mentioned in news articles. The organizational structure of the teachers and administrators was so confusing that it never worked quite as smoothly as Dollard and others anticipated. Under the plan presented to the Board of Education, the principal would be called the “Master Counselor.” He would work with two Associate Counselors, one who would be a neighborhood representative and another who would represent the State. Each of these three administrators had a special job: the Master Counselor was in charge of education, the Associate Counselor from the neighborhood was responsible for community needs, and the Associate Counselor from the State was to “[bring] in new ideas, [find] funding sources for ideas that originate in the neighborhood, and [coordinate] the use of environmental **extensions**.”²⁸ There were also neighborhood committees and teacher committees which met to evaluate the teachers and community interaction. This all requires an incredible amount of work on the part of the community and seems to have never taken off. The South Arsenal neighborhood changed so often as families

²⁷ Dollard, “S.A.N.D. History Repeats **Itself**,” p. 2.

²⁸ Dollard, “SAND Corporation’s Everywhere School,” p. 60.

were able to move out to “better” communities. While this was what Dollard hoped would be accomplished, it made the logistics of a community based educational system rather **difficult**.]

The classroom structure was just as confusing. Each MIA was to have a team of teachers for 150 students. The teachers were to decide what sort of educational theory they were going to employ within that particular space; it could be Montessori, or parochial, or more traditional with real desks set up in rows. Each teaching team was composed of a head teacher and four supporting teachers, each with a different educational strength. They were in turn supported by five teaching aides, which again came from the neighborhood and were to connect the students to their community. Two Program Designers and three Teaching Associates rounded out the teaching **staff** for the entire school – the Program Designers worked on curriculum and the Teaching Associates were people from all different walks of life who were simply there to impart their knowledge in their field of expertise. This is an amazingly complex organization requiring well trained individuals who can work together compatibly. The five-man teaching committee, composed of four head teachers and a member of the teachers union, were to review teaching applicants to ensure their qualifications for this type of school. When each MIA is run on a different educational theory it is a gargantuan task to find teachers qualified for any type of environment.

In spite of his criticism of why the school did not work, Dollard seemed to be in favor of building a new school and using the MIA buildings for other community-enhancing projects such as “programs in literacy, early childhood education, holistic health and nutrition; a recreation and cultural center; a market (training center) and center for the ‘preparation for **work**.’”²⁹ Despite the failure of the school he designed and was instrumental in creating, Dollard

²⁹ Dollard, “S.A.N.D. History Repeats Itself,” p. 2.

would not give up on the SAND community and his belief that they could pull themselves out of their poverty if only they had the resources.

The New Everywhere School

When a new school was built in 1996, the language used to describe it was Jack Dollard's. The new SAND Everywhere School opened in 1999. It is a two-story structure built in the traditional manner with individual classrooms all under one roof. Despite the differences in structure, an article from The *Hartford Courant* describes the new school as "designed to serve the community, so the cafeteria, auditorium and gymnasium are directly accessible from the outside, as well as from within. There is a health clinic for students and adults, as well as a secure, enclosed playground for young **children**."³⁰ Community accessibility was the back bone of Dollard's vision for the Everywhere School as he designed it. One of the architects of the new school, James Vance, added that "the building was really conceptualized as a symbol, a point around which neighborhood pride can evolve. The idea is to return the focus to the school. It is supposed to represent an optimism for the neighborhood that has been **eroding**."³¹ Another architect for the new school, Tai Soo Rim, claimed that "it is not only an elementary school. It is a hub of the **community**."³² Again, this is the language used by Jack Dollard when the school was originally designed. The Everywhere School was to be the focus of the community; indeed, the community was the school under Dollard's design. Board of education vice-president Ruth Hall acknowledged that this concept was not new: "'We are breaking new ground over old ideas," she said. While the practical aspects of Dollard's design were riddled with insurmountable flaws, the idea behind it was solid and optimistic. The original Everywhere School Working Paper claims that: "learning and the Everywhere School will form the physical

³⁰ Hamilton, sec. H1.

³¹ Hamilton, sec. H1.

³² Ricki Green, "Hopes High as Ground Broken," *The Hartford Courant*, February 19, 1997, Metro Hartford, B1.

and emotional spine of the new South Arsenal **community**.”³³ Jack Dollard’s open-classroom and open-campus plan for the Everywhere School may have been a failure, but his vision and goals are as relevant today as they were in 1967. The Everywhere School is once again a place around which a community can build.

In an interview twenty-two years later, Dollard described his disappointment with the SAND Everywhere School: “It was a crazy thing to do . . . So then I had to deal with all the frustrations: seeing that not carried out, seeing it bastardized. It’s incredible the things that happen like that . . . and so anyway, I don’t think anymore about having an impact or about doing something that is so absolute.. . where you put in all the plugs and work everything out and just say, ‘Here, just do this and it’s gonna be fine,’ because it *isn’t gonna* be fine and it *isn’t gonna* happen that **way**.”³⁴ The SAND Everywhere School was a product of the idealistic 1960s and the experimental 1970s. Although it was never built quite to Jack Dollard’s expectations and is considered a failure of urban renewal, it was not a complete loss. Throughout his time in Hartford, Jack Dollard continued to serve its poor urban communities. Even though the Everywhere School as Dollard created it no longer exists, the hope he instilled in the community survives and lives on through the new Everywhere School

³³ South Arsenal Neighborhood Development Corporation, p. 9.

³⁴ Wolfson, 60.